UNITED NATIONS

General Assembly

FIFTIETH SESSION

Official Records

THIRD COMMITTEE
23rd meeting
held on
Thursday, 9 November 1995
at 3 p.m.
New York

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 23rd MEETING

Chairman: Mrs. TAVARES DE ÁLVAREZ (Dominican Republic)
(Vice-Chairman)

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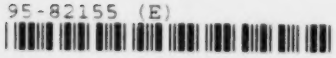
Distr. GENERAL
A/C.3/50/SR.23
14 December 1995
ENGLISH
ORIGINAL: SPANISH

95-82155 (E)



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In the absence of Mr. Tshering (Bhutan), Mrs. Tavares de Álvarez (Dominican Republic), Vice-Chairman, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3.20 p.m.

AGENDA ITEM 109: REPORT OF THE UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES, QUESTIONS RELATING TO REFUGEES, RETURNEES AND DISPLACED PERSONS AND HUMANITARIAN QUESTIONS (continued) (A/50/3, A/50/12 and Add.1, A/50/413, A/50/414, A/50/555, A/50/275-S/1995/555)

1. Mr. BULL (Liberia) said he had taken note of the improvements that were being made in the methodology to meet the needs of refugees world wide and welcomed in particular the efficacy of the strategy of preparedness, prevention and solutions. That strategy could be further enhanced to the extent that the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) could rely on the coordinated efforts of Governments, United Nations agencies and intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations.

2. As a country which had almost one third of its population as refugees in neighbouring countries, Liberia was deeply concerned about the world-wide increase in the number of refugees, internally displaced persons and returnees. It was also concerned about the relaxation by some countries of international regulations regarding the protection of refugee women and children. Some Governments had instituted restrictive policies which were in clear violation of international human rights instruments. It was therefore imperative that the human rights of refugees should be respected since in most instances those refugees were not responsible for the conditions which had precipitated their involuntary exodus.

3. The alarming refugee problem in Africa reinforced the need for the international community to address the root causes of that tragic situation. In that regard, it was encouraging to note the support being given to regional initiatives to improve the situation of the refugees through their voluntary repatriation. After nearly six years of civil war and the convening of several conferences aimed at ending the conflict in Liberia, the signing of the Abuja peace accord had ushered in a period of optimism. The leaders of the three principal factions were serving as members of a six-man Council of State.

4. In despite of isolated incidents of fighting between combatants of some factions, the new Liberian leadership had pledged its commitment to peace, the demobilization of the combatants and the repatriation and reintegration of Liberian refugees. Since the establishment of the Council of State, more than 12,000 Liberian refugees had voluntarily returned home. As the disarming of combatants was of vital importance to the peace process, a conference had recently been convened to seek international support for the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), which had deployed the ECOWAS Cease-fire Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) in Liberia, as well as for the inter-agency appeal for the provision of humanitarian assistance to Liberia and the implementation of development-oriented programmes aimed at capacity-building in the country. In that regard, he welcomed the initial response of the international community.

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5. In his thirteenth progress report on the United Nations Observer Mission in Liberia (UNOMIL), the Secretary-General had recommended that UNOMIL should be increased to its full strength so as to complement the efforts of ECOMOG in monitoring the disarming and demobilization of combatants. To that end, the Government of Liberia had established three commissions with the goals of disarming and reintegrating combatants and repatriating and resettling refugees and displaced persons. His Government was prepared to work closely with UNHCR in determining the requirements for the voluntary return of nearly 800,000 Liberian refugees in preparation for legislative and presidential elections in August 1996.

6. The Liberian Refugees Repatriation and Resettlement Commission would work closely with UNHCR. It was coordinating efforts with sectoral ministries, non-governmental organizations and other institutions and was seeking to mobilize resources so as to provide assistance to returnees and empower communities to resume productive activities, particularly in agriculture. His delegation hoped that the international community would support all those efforts as those activities were an integral part of the peace process designed to return the country to normalcy.

7. His delegation had always advocated that emphasis should be placed on the "continuum from relief to development" and supported the UNHCR concept of addressing humanitarian needs in a community context through area-based strategies and so-called quick impact projects (QIPs). It was estimated that children made up about 50 per cent of the refugee population. Due to their particular vulnerability, special attention should be given to children, especially unaccompanied children, since they were more traumatized and were more susceptible to exploitation. Therefore, host Governments should ensure that that group of refugees was adequately protected pursuant to the UNHCR guidelines on refugee children.

8. It was to be hoped that the international community would continue to assist Liberia in its efforts to repatriate and resettle its citizens who had been forced to flee the country as a result of the civil war. In view of the scarcity of financial resources, a comprehensive approach which gave priority attention to prevention, impact on asylum countries and durable solutions must be pursued. It was everyone's duty to stem the tide of refugee's.

9. Mrs. ACHARYA (Nepal) said that, while the tensions of the cold war had diminished since the early 1990s, in many countries of the world internal political strife and racial, ethnic and other types of conflict had contributed to an increase in the number of refugees and their problems. Many people, mostly innocent women and children, had fled their homelands in search of food and shelter. With the cooperation of many governmental and non-governmental organizations, UNHCR had been actively involved in the management of refugee problems all over the world. Her delegation commended its strategy of preparedness, prevention and solutions.

10. Despite limited human and material resources, UNHCR had been successful in alleviating the sufferings of refugees in many parts of the world. However, a durable solution to the problem would be possible only when the root causes of refugee flows were checked in time. Recent political and ethnic turmoil in

Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and Rwanda had created large new flows of refugees.

11. Currently, Nepal was shouldering the burden of 100,000 refugees from Bhutan. It reaffirmed the right of refugees to return to their country safely and with dignity and was grateful to UNHCR for its continued assistance in providing food, shelter, water, sanitation, health care, education and other community services to the refugee camps in eastern Nepal. Her Government was making every effort to solve the problem of those refugees through mutual discussion and understanding. The large-scale presence of refugees in countries of asylum, in particular least developed countries like Nepal, aggravated their economic problems and contributed to a further degradation of environmental and social conditions. Adequate attention should be given to that problem and special care should be provided to refugee women and children, particularly in conflict situations.

12. Mr. ALAIDROOS (Yemen) said that, while he commended the report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (A/50/12) and the policies which allowed UNHCR to perform the difficult tasks entrusted to it, he wished to offer some clarification regarding paragraphs 196 and 197 of the report. Paragraph 196 mentioned southern Yemen and paragraph 197 referred to northern Yemen as if they were two different countries. It should be recalled that in 1990, the two parts of Yemen had been reunified, after the victory over separatist forces, and the country had been named the Republic of Yemen.

13. Yemen was also surprised at the figures given in the two paragraphs for the number of refugees in the country. Despite the country's scarce resources, the destruction caused by the separatist war and the burden of providing assistance to hundreds of thousands of Yemeni returnees after the Gulf War, and also despite the attendant social and environmental consequences, Yemen had received some 60,000 refugees from Somalia, thousands more from various other countries and many more who had entered its territory illegally, fleeing from tragic situations in the Horn of Africa. In cooperation with UNHCR and other humanitarian organizations, his Government was providing all kinds of assistance to those refugees in various camps throughout the country. Its ability to continue providing that support, however, would depend on the generosity of the international community, international and regional organizations and the donor community in general.

14. Although his Government had expressed its willingness to receive refugees within the framework of international conventions and norms and humanitarian law, it was concerned by the flows of refugees that were entering the country illegally. Yemen required support to put an end to illegal immigration into its territory, in the interests of countries of origin, countries of asylum and the refugees themselves. The ideal solution for refugees would be repatriation and reintegration into their societies, but that could be achieved only through concerted efforts by all parties and by finding political solutions. Accordingly, Yemen supported the holding of a regional conference on refugees in the Horn of Africa.

15. UNHCR required every possible support in order to be able to share the burden involved in assisting and repatriating refugees, since the latter usually came from least developed countries. Lastly, Yemen welcomed the UNHCR strategy of preparedness, prevention and solutions, which had been very successful throughout the world.

16. Mr. PARSHIKOV (Russian Federation) said that the situation experienced by the Russian Federation since the break-up of the former Soviet Union had made aware of the noble humanitarian work done by UNHCR. Over the past four years, relations between the Russian Federation and UNHCR had been strengthened, especially through the Government's accession to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and the 1967 protocol and, beginning in 1995, its participation in the Executive Committee of the Programme of the United Nations High-Commissioner for Refugees which had given it an insight into the successful functioning of the threefold strategy of preparedness, prevention and solutions implemented by UNHCR.

17. During that period, his country witnessed the dedication of UNHCR to the ideals of human rights and to eliminating the causes and consequences of the displacement of persons world wide, including in its own territory where there was a strong possibility that the problem was going to become considerably worse. Over 70 million people in the region were living outside their own countries, including almost 25 million Russians living outside the Russian Federation and over 26 million non-Russians living in it.

18. According to calculations by the Federal Migration Service of the Russian Federation, over the next two years more than a million people would return to Russia from the Caucasus region, in addition to a further 2.9 million Russians who had earlier emigrated to the States of Central Asia. Internal conflicts in the Caucasus, Moldova and Central Asia had led to the displacement of over a million people. A further million people had been displaced within the countries of the former Soviet Union as a result of conflicts in the region. The way in which UNHCR was tackling the refugees' problem was consistent with the needs of the Russian Federation, which needed the support of the international community in order to alleviate tensions, prevent conflicts and restore stability, public order and peace in a country that, until recently, had not known democracy.

19. His delegation felt that UNHCR should focus its attention on preventive measures, including measures to prevent human rights violations, and should develop a strategy of prevention and reduction of mass exoduses. His delegation favoured the establishment of a global system for exchanging official information about possible refugee flows, so that the necessary conditions for receiving and assisting such refugees could be prepared in advance, with the active participation of UNHCR, of course. Experience gained with early warning systems in emergency situations should be taken fully into account.

20. His delegation was pleased that the international community had supported the proposal made by the Russian Federation in 1993 that refugee problems should be analyzed in all their aspects and was satisfied that the UNCHR report examined the provision of assistance to stabilize problems of migration and

alleviate the effects of refugee flows, in the context of the elaboration of general guidelines on the movement of persons.

21. His delegation welcomed the constructive participation of UNHCR in providing humanitarian assistance to the countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). Through the UNHCR office in the Russian Federation, an active dialogue had been established between Moscow and Geneva on all questions relating to the UNHCR mandate in that country and the coordination of activities.

22. The holding of a conference on the problems of refugees and other migrants in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) was crucial to the fate of millions of people of various ethnic backgrounds and political persuasions. Alleviating the suffering of those people and establishing coordinated methods in order to eliminate difficulties in working with migrants in each country of the Community, based on international human rights norms, was in the best interests of those States and contributed to strengthening civil society. His delegation hoped that the conference would make it possible to analyse problems related to the dynamic of displacement, shed light on displaced persons' most pressing needs in the areas of legal protection and practical assistance, examine problems of prevention and find long-term solutions for those problems.

23. In preparation for the conference, a meeting of experts had been held at Geneva and there had been subregional meetings at Tbilisi, Ashgabat and Kiev. It had been found that the international community was increasingly aware of the problem of migration in the territory of the CIS, and that gave reason to hope that genuine, practical results would be achieved. The wide range of situations and the different ways in which international norms and national laws were being applied to the various migrant groups in countries of the region required the adoption of non-conventional criteria. His delegation hoped that all the countries of the CIS and neighbouring States would participate actively in the preparatory process for the conference, fully aware of the possibilities and the advantages of finding balanced solutions to that important humanitarian problem in a collective, non-confrontational manner. It was also confident that other concerned States and governmental and non-governmental international organizations would participate in the conference. His delegation, along with other sponsors, would be presenting a draft resolution to that effect, which he hoped would be adopted by consensus.

24. In view of the obvious link between human rights violations, the mass displacement of persons and the emergence of threats to international peace and security, Russia agreed with UNHCR that human rights monitoring must be one of the preventive measures included in plans for United Nations peace-keeping activities and in negotiations on peaceful settlement of disputes, and that safeguarding human rights was closely linked to the protection of refugees.

25. Mr. SANTAPUTRA (Thailand) expressed appreciation to the High Commissioner and her staff for their efforts, in cooperation with the Thai Government, to assist Indo-Chinese refugees, non-refugees and asylum-seekers in Thailand. History had shown that only through multilateral and bilateral cooperation, and in many instances also through the help of a mediator could that problem be relieved, reduced and eventually resolved. The nobleness of purpose and

intention of UNHCR made it an ideal facilitator in certain situations, since its work cut across borders, race, colour, religion, culture, language and even regimes. For all those reasons, it had the full support of his Government.

26. In 1994, Thailand had contributed over $80,000 to the Department of Humanitarian Affairs to help victims of the crisis in Rwanda. Of that amount, nearly $50,000 had been designated for UNHCR and non-governmental organizations to assist in the resettlement of returnees and internally displaced Rwandans. His delegation urged other countries to contribute whatever they could in order to show their commitment to the work of UNHCR. Because it was aware of the burden which the problem of refugees and displaced persons could place on a country, Thailand felt that the best solution was repatriation, so that such people could become assets in the rehabilitation and development of their own countries.

27. Thailand's experience as a country of first asylum had taught it the following lessons: (a) countries of origin must facilitate a solution by creating conditions which made returning worthwhile; (b) bona fide refugees should be resettled in third countries, while non-refugees and displaced persons should be repatriated in order to ensure that there were no residual problems in countries of first refuge; (c) countries of first refuge must balance humanitarian concerns with their own security and interests, since the concept of "local settlement" could cause social problems; (d) international burden-sharing regarding refugees could not be overemphasized, since a good settlement programme in third countries and pressure on countries of origin to create a conducive environment for returnees encouraged and gave moral comfort to countries of first refuge; (e) comprehensive plans of action like the one for Indo-Chinese refugees must be negotiated; (f) UNHCR should study the possibility of setting up "safe zones" within countries of origin in order to provide a safe haven for returnees and displaced persons under its non-partisan care; (g) refugees and displaced persons must conform to the laws and regulations of their country of refuge, including lawful measures taken for the maintenance of public order, as stipulated in the conclusions of the thirty-eighth session of the Executive Committee, held in 1987; and (h) the effects of refugees on the environment must be addressed and unnecessary depletion of natural resources should be avoided: education and the dissemination of relevant information could help lessen that problem.

28. In the case of Indo-Chinese refugees, all parties concerned must complete the repatriation programme without delay, in accordance with the Comprehensive Plan of Action for Indo-Chinese Refugees which was acknowledged to be the best precedent in dealing with a crisis at regional level. The country of first refuge, the third country for resettlement and particularly the country of origin must share the burden and solve the problem. UNHCR could only help facilitate a solution. The international community, for its part, could help reduce the burden until a solution was found.

29. Mrs. TAY (Togo) said that, despite the seriousness of humanitarian crises and their sometimes incomprehensibly sudden appearance, UNHCR invariably tried to come to the aid of people whose existence was seriously threatened. For that reason, it was necessary to recognize unequivocally the efforts made every day by UNHCR to help thousands of people survive, with the help of the international

community and the voluntary contributions of generous donors. Her delegation noted with concern that UNHCR was looking after 28.7 million refugees and, especially, that more than half of those refugees were on the African continent. It was gratifying that most of the activities carried out during the period under consideration had been directed towards delivering those people from hunger, poverty, violence and even death by providing them with appropriate assistance and help.

30. Her delegation recognized and supported the efforts made to encourage voluntary repatriation and the return of displaced persons to their places of origin, as well as the mechanisms and methods used to reintegrate them into society. The seriousness of the refugee problems in the Great Lakes region had led UNHCR to hold the Bujumbura regional conference, which had culminated in the adoption of a plan of action to limit the consequences of that scourge. She had great respect for those initiatives and the various plans approved, but the international community and the countries concerned must do everything in their power to participate fully and effectively in implementing them.

31. The refugee problem had reached such a level because of the persistence of internal and international conflicts, changes in the political situation, the emergence of democratization processes, and massive violations of human rights. Clearly, the political, economic and social consequences of that problem were not helping to bring about the peace, security and well-being for which mankind yearned. With that in mind, her delegation considered the strategy proposed by UNHCR for strengthening the coordination of humanitarian activities with other United Nations organs and organizations to be a sensible one.

32. The solution should also be a comprehensive one based on prevention, mitigation of damage to the environment and the search for sustainable solutions, which should be based on the political will to protect, defend and promote human rights, guarantee the participation of citizens in government and create an enabling environment for economic and social progress. The achievement of sustainable solutions required national, regional and international solidarity, which meant that financial and human resources exceeding the capacity of a single country or small group of countries had to be mobilized. It was in that light that the international community should view the proposal of the President of Zaire to convene a world conference on that important subject, which had been endorsed by the Thirty-first Conference of Heads of State and Government of the Organization of African Unity, held in Addis Ababa in June 1995. Togo was of the view that the convening of such a conference would give impetus to the formulation of comprehensive and practical guidelines for dealing with the refugee problem in the best way possible and in the interest of all mankind.

33. With regard to paragraph 92 of the report of the High Commissioner for Refugees (A/50/12), in which reference was made to the situation in Togo, her delegation wished to update the Committee's information by reporting that, following the adoption of the general amnesty referred to in that paragraph, on 12 August 1995, the Government of Togo and UNHCR had signed an agreement in Lomé for the repatriation of Togolese refugees. In order to contribute to the establishment of a UNHCR office in Lomé, the two parties had signed a headquarters agreement on 26 October 1995 to provide the UNHCR representation

with all the facilities and advantages to enable it to fulfil its objectives under optimum conditions. The results achieved thus far could be considered satisfactory.

34. Mr. GUBAREVICH (Belarus) said that his delegation wished to pay tribute to the dedicated staff of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and other international organizations who spared no effort in defending refugees and displaced persons and improving their situation. Given the dangers faced by humanitarian personnel in the performance of their tasks, Belarus agreed with Ukraine and Japan, among other countries, that it was necessary to afford them protection within the framework of the Convention on the Safety of United Nations and Associated Personnel. In that connection, it should be recalled that Belarus had been the thirty-fourth State to sign the Convention.

35. Despite the tireless efforts of UNHCR and numerous non-governmental organizations, there were currently more than 27 million refugees and displaced persons throughout the world. Unfortunately, Belarus was no stranger to the influx of refugees into its territory for well-known reasons that were related to the disintegration of the USSR. The situation was made worse by the fact that the borders of many of the States members of the Commonwealth of Independent States were still not clearly delimited and no clear immigration policies existed.

36. The competent authorities of Belarus were in the process of determining which of the approximately 28,000 persons who had sought refuge in the country during the previous few years should be granted refugee status. Of that number, more than 10,000 were from the Baltic countries, 4,000 were from the Russian Federation and the remainder from the countries of central Asia and the Caucasian region. Nearly half the total number of refugees were of Belorussian origin. For many refugees, Belarus was a country of transit en route to Western Europe and the United States of America. However, given the problems facing countries of asylum, many of those refugees, some of whom were illegal, were not likely to find asylum, which would further exacerbate the refugee problem in Belarus. The number of illegal immigrants currently in the country was estimated to be between 100,000 and 400,000. Many of them were involved in the growing wave of criminal activity which was connected to drug trafficking and smuggling.

37. The situation was a cause of deep concern for the Government of Belarus, which was seeking to develop an appropriate legal framework for regulating immigration. In July 1995, a law on refugees had entered into force and a draft law on migration policy was about to be completed. However, in order to adequately address the problem of refugees and displaced persons, it was necessary to promote cooperation among countries of origin, countries of transit and countries of destination, an effort that required the participation of the relevant international organizations.

38. The delegation of Belarus commended UNHCR on its activities in the Commonwealth of Independent States on behalf of refugees, stateless persons and displaced persons in the area and supported the proposal to convene a regional conference in mid-1996 to seek a solution to the problem. Belarus wished to reiterate its proposal that the regional conference should be held in Minsk.

The preparations for the conference, in which the International Organization for Migration had actively participated, had made a valuable contribution to the assessment of the real situation in the region. Finally, his delegation wished to give the assurance that the Government of Belarus would continue to support the work of UNHCR, which had just opened a regional office in Minsk.

39. Mr. WILLE (Norway) said that, as the number of persons in need of international protection escalated dramatically, there had been a recognition of the need to more systematically address issues related to such protection in situations of massive emergencies. In that connection, the high priority given to the strengthening of the emergency preparedness and response capacity of UNHCR was most encouraging. Norway also welcomed the call on UNHCR to develop a set of guiding principles to ensure the protection of persons fleeing situations of conflict and who were subsequently unable to return to their countries of origin. The international protection of refugees was the central pillar of the mandate of UNHCR, whose juridical basis continued to be the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol. Norway called on all States which had not yet done so to accede to those instruments and to implement them fully. In that connection, it should be mentioned that Norway had introduced the concept of temporary protection, as an integral part of its refugee policy, to encourage a phased and orderly approach to repatriation, which should be the aim of any refugee policy, when conditions so permitted

40. Currently, internally displaced persons far outnumbered those considered to be refugees under the 1951 Convention. Norway had advocated in various contexts that the needs of internally displaced persons should be placed on the international agenda. Removing the factors that forced people to flee their homes might prevent internal displacements and refugee flows. The efforts of UNHCR to operationalize the criteria and principles for involvement on behalf of internally displaced persons were therefore welcome.

41. Human rights violations were a major factor in causing the flight of refugees as well as an obstacle to their safe and voluntary return home. Although the Office of the High Commissioner had rightly intensified its cooperation with the United Nations human rights machinery, the responsibility of States to prevent circumstances that gave rise to refugee flows and to promote instead conditions conducive to voluntary repatriation must be underlined. Norway welcomed the conclusions on refugee women which had been adopted at the previous session of the Executive Committee of UNHCR. It was also pleased that the Fourth World Conference on Women, which had been held earlier that year in Beijing, had underlined the need to provide protection, assistance and training to refugee women. The challenge now was to ensure that the calls for action were implemented. Norway also strongly supported the efforts of UNHCR to protect and assist refugee children.

42. At its recent session, the Executive Committee had also adopted important decisions on strengthening the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance. In the field of humanitarian relief, the ongoing efforts to achieve the best possible arrangements with implementing partners constituted an important factor for the work of UNHCR. Norway had therefore followed with great interest the "Partnership in Action" process (PARINAC) initiated by UNHCR and the International Council of Voluntary Agencies. Lastly, his Government

pledged its continued support and cooperation to UNHCR and commended the High Commissioner for the steps taken to modernize the budget structure and establish new working methods for the Executive Committee.

43. Mr. POERNOMO (Indonesia) said that UNHCR had achieved a high level of performance in providing assistance and protection to millions of refugees, displaced persons and others requiring humanitarian assistance throughout the world; in particular, his delegation welcomed the coordination established by UNHCR with other relevant bodies of the United Nations system to respond to complex emergency situations. Improved collaboration between UNHCR and the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights would assist in raising awareness of the relationship between refugee issues and broader human rights concerns and would also enable UNHCR to perform its fundamental role in the area of protection more efficiently.

44. In the same context, his delegation was encouraged that UNHCR was participating actively in all the meetings of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), since IASC performed a useful role in clarifying mandates and bringing greater coordination to emerging situations. The relationship between UNHCR and the Department of Humanitarian Affairs should also be maintained. In the context of inter-agency cooperation, his delegation noted the participation of UNHCR in the work of the Administrative Committee on Coordination and the Consultative Committee on Programme and Operational Questions in the continuum from emergency relief to development.

45. UNHCR was continuing to integrate the particular needs of refugee women and children into its programme planning and implementation. In that respect, he wished to note the activities of the Working Group on Refugee Women and Refugee Children and the decision to create four new posts of Regional Adviser on Refugee Women. His delegation welcomed the efforts that were being made by UNHCR for the identification, registration and tracing of unaccompanied children, and supported the conclusion reached in the report of the Secretary-General (A/50/555) that closer collaboration between UNHCR and UNICEF would help further improve emergency response.

46. In South-East Asia, progress continued to be made in finding a solution to the region's refugee problem, with the valuable assistance and cooperation of UNHCR. However, all the activities under the Comprehensive Plan of Action for Indo-Chinese Refugees were to be terminated by the end of 1995. For some 20 years, Indonesia and the other countries of first asylum within the region had borne their share of the burden and were continuing to provide humanitarian assistance to refugees. His delegation therefore called upon all the parties concerned to continue their support until the problem was finally resolved.

47. Mr. BADRI (Djibouti) said that currently there were more than 27 million refugees and displaced persons in the world, of whom more than 50 per cent were in Africa. The great majority of refugees were women, children and elderly persons who needed special protection and assistance at a time when financial resources were being exhausted because the traditional generosity which had prevailed throughout the world was disappearing and because some countries, not always the poorest, were beginning to adopt restrictive policies regarding the right of asylum.

48. East Africa, in particular the Horn of Africa, was one of the areas most affected by the problem of refugees. That tragedy, which went back several decades, was a consequence both of the incessant conflicts and of floods and droughts which gave rise to great shortages of food. At the meeting of heads of State of the subregion held in Addis Ababa in 1992 with a view to seeking a lasting solution to that human tragedy, it had been recognized that the only way of finally resolving the problem was not simply through achieving a peaceful solution of conflicts but also, and above all, through improving the economic situation of the countries concerned. Although significant progress had been made in recent years with the return of Ethiopian and Eritrean refugees, the question of refugees in the Horn of Africa remained the main concern of Governments of the subregion because of the situation in Somalia. Despite some attempts by the international community to provide assistance to Somalia, the problem had not yet been solved. The absence of a Government or administration, the conflicts which had destroyed Somalia, violence and insecurity had forced hundreds of thousands of Somalis to seek permanent refuge in neighbouring countries, particularly in Ethiopia, Kenya and Djibouti.

49. After it had gained independence in 1977, Djibouti had received thousands of refugees fleeing wars. Currently it was hosting over 100,000 refugees and displaced persons. Since Djibouti had a population of 500,000, that was a considerable burden. As a result of that situation, insecurity had increased and, in addition, there was great pressure on the already limited resources and on Djibouti's precarious socio-economic infrastructure. Some 40 per cent of health services were provided to refugees and the employment situation was being affected by the refugees, who were prepared to work for very low wages. Unless a lasting solution was found soon, the problem would also affect Djibouti's political situation.

50. Despite appeals for assistance to the international community, to which there had been no response, and the difficulties it was facing, Djibouti had never opted for a policy of restriction or closure of its borders. Djibouti, in cooperation with UNHCR, had encouraged the voluntary repatriation of refugees when conditions in the country of repatriation permitted. Unfortunately, those operations were constantly interrupted because of the lack of the necessary resources. The only possible solution to that tragic situation was to provide substantial assistance to the asylum countries in the region and to help Somalia. It was not enough to provide humanitarian assistance to combat hunger; Somalia must be helped in re-establishing its institutions, reconstituting its infrastructure and starting up its economy. It was only then that it would be possible for the region to regain the political and social stability which was essential for economic development.

51. Djibouti endorsed the Secretary-General's comment in his report on assistance to refugees, returnees and displaced persons in Africa that "the persistence of population movements and refugee flows calls for a comprehensive approach focusing on three principal elements: prevention, the adverse impact of refugees on asylum countries, and the search for durable solutions" (A/50/413, para. 10). A good economic situation was the best preventive. Many conflicts arose because of the conditions of poverty in which the population lived; such conflicts could be avoided by providing development assistance according to countries' needs, instead of spending millions of dollars on the

distribution of humanitarian aid or the organization of conferences for reconciliation.

52. Mr. LUKABU (Zaire) said that owing to its geographical location, his country had faced refugee problems since gaining its independence because it shared borders with nine African countries which had, on various occasions, sent streams of refugees to its territory. Since 1959 the largest number of massive flows of refugees seeking asylum in Zaire had come from the Great Lakes region. The presence of nearly three million refugees, who had entered Zaire as a result of the tragic events in Rwanda and Burundi, represented an unparalleled challenge and burden for the Government and population of his country.

53. His delegation was disappointed that the report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) had failed to mention the sacrifices made by his country and its people. According to the statement by the President of the Republic of Zaire on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations, while the 15 countries of the European Union had accepted onto their territory 700,000 refugees from the former Yugoslavia, Zaire had welcomed more than two million refugees. Despite the hospitality, generosity and humanity it had shown, Zaire alone had been criticized rather than supported by the international community. Zaire would never agree to be made the scapegoat; nor was it willing to mortgage the security, development and equilibrium of its population in order to keep hundreds of thousands of refugees on its territory for an indefinite period of time. The international community could not remain indifferent to the suffering of Zaire and then criticize it for its decision to return refugees to their country of origin.

54. With regard to the question of local settlement to which reference was made in the report (A/50/12, paras. 53 to 55), and according to the previously mentioned statement by the President of the Republic, Zaire refused to be an accomplice to the policy being implemented by Rwanda and Burundi which would transform the vast majority of Zaire's eastern territory into Hutu land. Along with the President, the Zairian Government, Parliament and population vigorously rejected the idea of "local settlement" recommended in the report. The question of installing the Rwandese Hutus on the territory of Zaire in order to placate the Tutsi authority in Kigali was of great importance for his country and one on which his Government had taken a clear position. In a decision adopted on 28 April 1995, the High Council of the Republic, the transitional parliament, bearing in mind all the adverse consequences for the Zairians which resulted from the presence of refugees from Rwanda and Burundi, including ecological problems, criminal acts and attempts to dominate the indigenous inhabitants, had decided to demand the unconditional return, without delay, of all refugees and immigrants from those countries. He hoped that the international community, without neglecting Tanzania which was faced with similar difficulties, would mobilize support to help Zaire deal with the consequences arising from the excessively prolonged stay of the refugees in one of the most beautiful areas of the country.

55. Mr. HAMZA (Iraq) said that refugees were an international responsibility because the problem affected both the country of origin and the international community as a whole, which must offer protection. In that regard UNHCR played

a noteworthy role in providing assistance to refugees and alleviating their suffering.

56. With regard to the UNHCR report (A/50/12), and in particular the reference to Iraqi refugees in neighbouring countries, his country had never been in a situation where its citizens migrated to other countries as refugees. On the contrary, it had always offered asylum and refuge to individuals arriving on its territory. Iraqis were leaving the country as a direct consequence of the exceptional circumstances created by the unjust United Nations embargo and, before that, the military aggression carried out by the international alliance against his country. The economic embargo, which was no longer justified since Iraq had complied with the relevant resolutions, had caused a serious shortage of food and medicine, producing a substantial decline in the quality of life of the Iraqi people, some of whom had been obliged to leave the country in search of better conditions, hoping to return when the situation improved. In addition, in the country's northern region, internal struggles between local factions had led to another exodus of citizens to neighbouring countries. In order to resolve that problem, interference in the internal affairs of the country must cease so that it could re-establish the conditions of security and stability needed for the return of the refugees.

57. One of the adverse consequences of sanctions was obviously the displacement of thousands of specialized workers who had been forced to leave the country. The international community should give careful thought to the validity of the system of sanctions and seek new mechanisms which could mitigate the serious consequences of their arbitrary imposition. The United Nations, through the Economic and Social Council and human rights bodies, must examine the question of the relationship between migration and development with a view to promoting the development of countries whose economic circumstances were giving rise to emigration. Reaffirmation was also needed of the importance of assistance from developed countries to the developing countries to help them achieve the technical and economic capacities conducive to development and progress. The Iraqi citizens who had been forced to leave their country would return when the embargo was raised. His Government therefore urged the United Nations to consider the possibility of ending or reducing the economic sanctions, since there was no longer any justification for maintaining them.

58. Mrs. KARINA (Latvia), speaking in exercise of the right of reply and on behalf of her country and Lithuania, said that she welcomed the information provided by the representative of Belarus, in particular that portion concerning the Baltic States. The representative of Belarus had said that in recent years approximately 28,000 individuals had sought refugee status in Belarus, mainly persons from the Baltic States, the Russian Federation, Central Asia and the region of the Caucasus. In the view of Latvia and Lithuania, the population flow from the Baltic States to Belarus was a result of the return of individuals of Belarus origin to their homeland. Latvia and Lithuania appreciated the efforts of the Belarus authorities to give careful scrutiny to each case in order to distinguish between refugees and those who were going back to their country as returnees.

59. Mrs. INTELMANN (Estonia), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said that she had taken note with interest of the number of persons who had sought

refugee status in Belarus in recent years. The breakup of the Soviet Union had clearly given rise to a substantial flow of refugees, due in part to the desire of many persons to return to their country of origin. The Government of Estonia was studying that question thoroughly and, as a sign of its good will and so that individuals could exercise their right to return to their country of origin, had established a special fund for that purpose.

60. Mr. GUBAREVICH (Belarus), speaking in exercise of the right of reply and after having welcomed the preceding statements, said that his Government had not referred to Baltic refugees when it had spoken of the 10,000 former inhabitants of the Baltic States who, in accordance with national law in Belarus, had simply presented their requests for refugee status in Belarus. Many of those individuals might well be repatriated once the Government had reviewed their request, since refugee status could not be granted to all applicants. He wished to reiterate that the requests were being carefully examined, on a case-by-case basis.

The meeting rose at 5.30 p.m.